

Reconstruction and Daily Life

MAIN IDEA

As the South rebuilt, millions of newly freed African Americans worked to improve their lives.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Many important African-American institutions, including colleges, began during Reconstruction.

TERMS & NAMES

freedmen's school Ku Klux Klan
sharecropping lynch

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

One day, as the Civil War came to a close, two enslaved women named Mill and Jule saw a fleet of Union gunboats coming up the Mississippi River. Yankee soldiers came ashore and offered them and other slaves passage aboard their boats. On that day, Mill and Jule left the plantation.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

An' we all got on the boat in a hurry . . . we all give three times three cheers for the gunboat boys, and . . . three times three cheers for gov'ment.

Mill and Jule, quoted in *We Are Your Sisters*



The Union's victory in the Civil War spelled the end of slavery in America. In this section, you will learn about the gains and setbacks of former slaves during Reconstruction.

Freed people and federal soldier pose on a South Carolina plantation.

Taking Notes

Use your chart to take notes about education, the economy, and the Ku Klux Klan.

Problems

- Black codes
- President Johnson
- Education
- Economy
- Ku Klux Klan
- Voting

Responding to Freedom

African Americans' first reaction to freedom was to leave the plantations. No longer needing passes to travel, they journeyed throughout the region. "Right off colored folks started on the move," recalled one freedman. "They seemed to want to get closer to freedom, so they'd know what it was—like it was a place or a city." Some former slaves returned to the places where they were born. Others went looking for more economic opportunity. Still others traveled just because they could.

African Americans also traveled in search of family members separated from them during slavery. One man walked 600 miles from Georgia to North Carolina to find his family. To locate relatives, people placed advertisements in newspapers. The Freedmen's Bureau helped many families reunite. A Union officer wrote in 1865, "Men are taking

ReadingHistory

A. Analyzing

Causes For what reasons did former slaves move?

their wives and children, families which had been for a long time broken up are united and oh! such happiness."

Freedom allowed African Americans to strengthen their family ties. Former slaves could marry legally. They could raise families without fearing that their children might be sold. Many families adopted children of dead relatives and friends to keep family ties strong.

Starting Schools

With freedom, African Americans no longer had to work for an owner's benefit. They could now work to provide for their families. To reach their goal of economic independence, however, most had to learn to read and write. As a result, children and adults flocked to **freedmen's schools** set up to educate newly freed African Americans. Such schools were started by the Freedmen's Bureau, Northern missionary groups, and African-American organizations. Freed people in cities held classes in warehouses, billiard rooms, and former slave markets. In rural areas, classes were held in churches and houses. Children who went to school often taught their parents to read at home.

In the years after the war, African-American groups raised more than \$1 million for education. However, the federal government and private groups in the North paid most of the cost of building schools and hiring teachers. Between 1865 and 1870, the Freedmen's Bureau spent \$5 million for this purpose.

More than 150,000 African-American students were attending 3,000 schools by 1869. About 10 percent of the South's African-American adults could read. A number of them became teachers. Northern teachers, black and white, also went South to teach freed people. Many white Southerners, however, worked against these teachers' efforts. White racists even killed teachers and burned freedmen's schools in some parts of the South. Despite these setbacks, African Americans kept working toward an education.

ReadingHistory

B. Finding Main

Ideas Why did freed people desire an education?

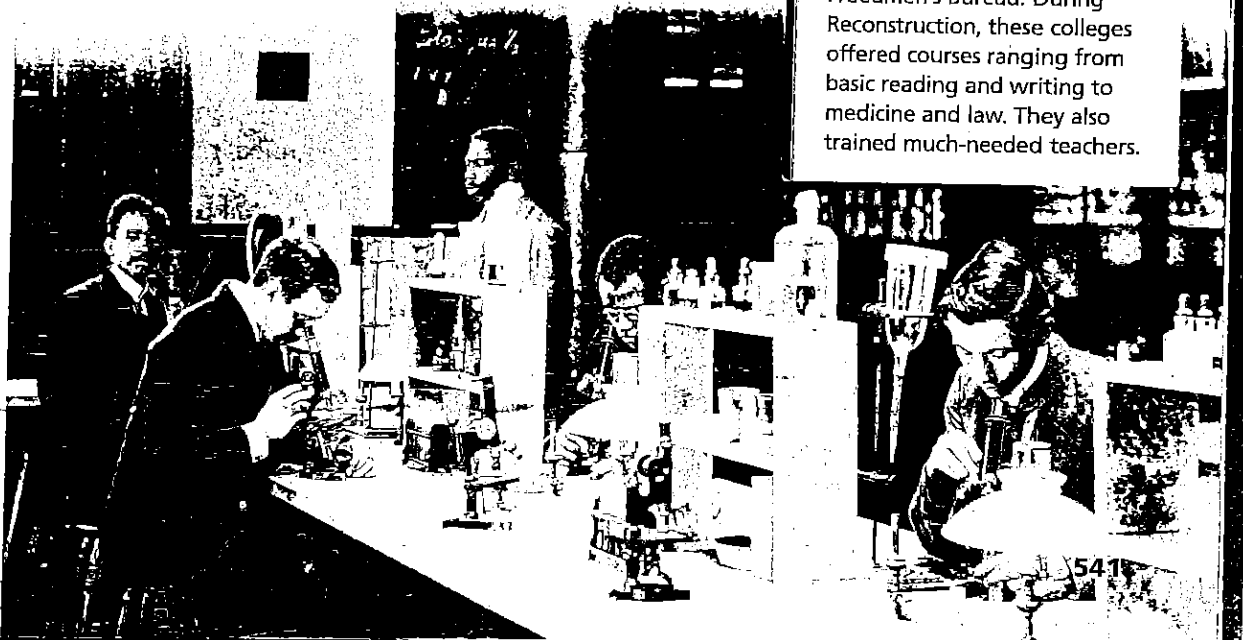
Background

Most African Americans were illiterate because teaching slaves to read and write had been illegal.

America's HERITAGE

BLACK COLLEGES

Some of today's African-American colleges and universities date back to Reconstruction. The Freedmen's Bureau and other societies raised funds to build many of the schools. Howard University, shown in this photograph, opened in 1867. It was named for General Oliver Otis Howard, head of the Freedmen's Bureau. During Reconstruction, these colleges offered courses ranging from basic reading and writing to medicine and law. They also trained much-needed teachers.





African-American families hoped to own land but were often disappointed.

40 Acres and a Mule

More than anything else, freed people wanted to own land. As one freedman said, "Give us our own land and we take care of ourselves, but without land, the old masters can hire us or starve us, as they please."

As the Civil War ended, General William T. Sherman suggested that abandoned land in coastal South Carolina be split into 40-acre parcels and given to freedmen. The rumor then spread that all freedmen would get 40 acres and a mule. Most African Americans thought they deserved at least that much. In the end, however, most freedmen never received land. Those who did often had to return it to its former owners after the owners were pardoned by President Johnson. One freedman, Bayley Wyatt, protested.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Our wives, our children, our husbands, [have] been sold over and over again to purchase the lands we now [locate] upon; for that reason we have a divine right to the land. . . . And then didn't we clear the land, and raise the crops of corn, of cotton, of tobacco, of rice, of sugar, of everything.

Bayley Wyatt, quoted in *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*

Radical Republican leaders Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner pushed to make land reform part of the Reconstruction Acts of 1867. Stevens proposed a plan to Congress that would have taken land from plantation owners and given it to freed people.

Many moderate Republicans and even some Radicals were against the plan. They believed that new civil and voting rights were enough to give African Americans a better life.

Supporters of the plan argued that civil rights meant little without economic independence. Land could provide that independence, they claimed. However, Congress did not pass the land-reform plan.

The Contract System

Without their own property, many African Americans returned to work on plantations. They returned not as slaves but as wage earners. They and the planters both had trouble getting used to this new relationship. "It seems humiliating to be compelled to bargain and haggle with our own servants about wages," wrote the daughter of a Georgia plantation owner. For their part, many freed workers assumed that wages were extra. They thought that the planters still had to house and feed them.

After the Civil War, planters desperately needed workers to raise cotton, still the South's main cash crop. African Americans reacted to this demand for labor by choosing the best contract offers. The contract system was far better than slavery. African Americans could decide whom to work for, and planters could not abuse them or split up families.

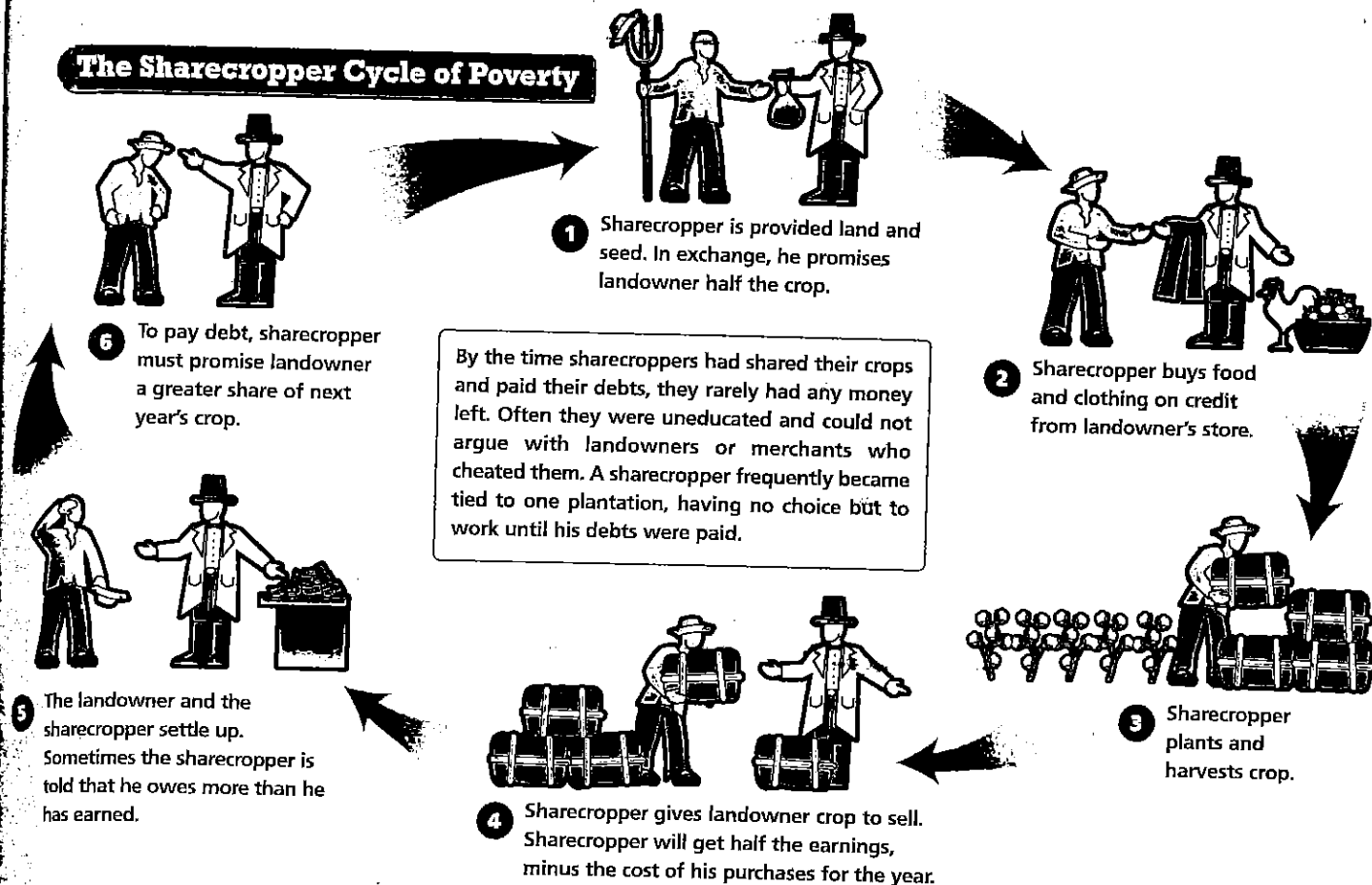
The contract system still had drawbacks, however. Even the best contracts paid very low wages. Workers often could not leave the plantations

ReadingHistory

C. Analyzing Points of View
What were some arguments in favor of giving land to freed people?

Background
Civil War deaths and the departure of slaves from plantations created a labor shortage in the South.

The Sharecropper Cycle of Poverty



without permission. Many owners cheated workers out of wages and other benefits. Worse yet, laws punished workers for breaking their contracts, even if the plantation owners were abusing or cheating them. These drawbacks made many African Americans turn to sharecropping.

Sharecropping and Debt

Under the sharecropping system, a worker rented a plot of land to farm. The landowner provided the tools, seed, and housing. When harvest time came, the sharecropper gave the landowner a share of the crop. This system gave families without land a place to farm and gave landowners cheap labor.

But problems soon arose with the sharecropping system. One cause of these problems was that farmers and landowners had opposite goals. Farmers wanted to grow food to feed their families, but landowners forced them to grow cash crops, such as cotton. As a result, farmers had to buy food from the local store—which was usually owned by the landlord. Most farmers did not have the money to pay for goods. As a result, many were caught in a cycle of debt, as shown in the diagram above. Often farmers had to use one year's harvest to pay the previous year's bills.

White farmers also became sharecroppers. Many had lost their land in the war. Others had lost it to taxes. By 1880, one-third of the white farmers in the Deep South worked someone else's land.

No matter who worked the plantations, much of what they grew was cotton. After the war, the value of cotton dropped. Southern planters responded by trying to produce more of the cash crop—a move that

ReadingHistory

D. Recognizing Effects What were some problems with the sharecropping system?

drove down prices even further. Growing cotton exhausted the soil and reduced the amount of land available for food crops. As a result, the South had to import half its food. Relying on cotton was one reason the Deep South experienced years of rural poverty.

The Ku Klux Klan

African Americans in the South faced other problems besides poverty. They also faced violent racism. Many planters and former Confederate soldiers did not want African Americans to have more rights. In 1866,

such feelings spurred the rise of a secret group called the **Ku Klux Klan**. The Klan's goals were to restore Democratic control of the South and keep former slaves powerless.

The Klan attacked African Americans. Often it targeted those who owned land or had become prosperous. Klansmen rode on horseback and dressed in white robes and hoods. They beat people and burned homes. They even **lynched** some victims, killing them on the spot without a trial as punishment for a supposed crime. The Klan also attacked white Republicans.

Klan victims had little protection. Military authorities in the South often ignored the violence. President Johnson had appointed most of these authorities, and they were against Reconstruction.

The Klan's terrorism served the Democratic Party. As gun-toting Klansmen kept Republicans away from the polls, the Democrats increased their power.

In the next section you will see how planters took back control of the South. You also will learn how they blocked African Americans' attempts to win more rights.

ReadingHistory
E. Finding Main Ideas What were the goals of the Ku Klux Klan?



These Ku Klux Klan members were arrested after an 1868 riot in Alabama.

Section 2 Assessment

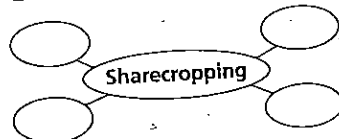
1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- freedmen's school
- sharecropping
- Ku Klux Klan
- lynch

2. Using Graphics

Use a cluster diagram like the one below to review details about sharecropping.



For farmers, what were the advantages and disadvantages of sharecropping?

3. Main Ideas

- How did freedom help strengthen African-American families?
- How were African Americans educated during Reconstruction?
- What were the main reasons African Americans wanted their own land?

4. Critical Thinking

Analyzing Causes

Despite greater civil rights, why did African Americans still face difficulty in improving their lives?

THINK ABOUT

- the defeat of the land-reform bill
- the Ku Klux Klan's rise
- the attitude of military authorities in the South

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

SPEECH

ART

Make a speech to President Johnson or design a mural explaining why land should be given to newly freed African Americans.

Name _____

Date _____

18

In-Depth Resources: Unit 5

Guided Reading

A. Recognizing Effects As you read this section, answer the questions about changes for freed African Americans during Reconstruction.

1. Where did they go after slavery ended, and why?

2. How did they strengthen their families?

3. How were they educated?

4. Why did they want land, and why didn't they get it?

5. What was it like for them to work under the contract system?

6. What was it like for them to work under the sharecropping system?

7. How did the Ku Klux Klan affect their lives?

B. Making Inferences On the back of this paper, tell what you think would have happened if freed people had been guaranteed their own plots of land.

Name _____

Date _____

In-Depth Resources: Unit 5

18

Reteaching Activity

Finding Main Ideas

Below are some general statements about daily life following the Civil War. Read each statement, and then supply details from the section that support it.

1. Newly freed African Americans were eager to obtain an education.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. African Americans had trouble obtaining land of their own.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

3. The contract system was better than slavery but had drawbacks.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

4. The practice of sharecropping had some advantages but also had drawbacks.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

5. African Americans faced violent racism in the South.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

